

Profligate Knicks have become so dysfunctional even fans are hoping they keep losing



Dave Hannigan America at Large

Side boasts two of the top five earners in NBA yet vies with 76ers for the title of worst team

Shortly before the NBA season began, Phil Jackson announced that the New York Knicks had begun "mindfulness" training to make them better understand and appreciate being and breathing in the moment. Nobody was too surprised that a few months into his role as president of basketball operations, a man known as "Zen Master" was preaching the need to always find inner calm amid turmoil. When his team subsequently lost 20 out of their first 24 games, however, no amount of Buddhist meditation techniques were likely to be enough to keep the peace.

During a recent defeat by local rivals, the Brooklyn Nets, the Knicks' star turn Carmelo Anthony threatened to beat up team-mate Tim Hardaway Jr. Signed to a five-year \$124m contract extension last summer, the notoriously selfish Anthony took umbrage when his younger colleague had the temerity to shout "get the rebound" in his direction. On the way back down the court, he cursed Hardaway out and told him he'd pay for it in the lock-

er-room later. They never did come to blows but their feud is apparently only one of many simmering conflicts in a club riven by dissent.

The players seem reluctant to defend when they don't have possession and are reportedly unhappy at being made to work out the day after games. Rookie coach Derek Fisher looks like a man learning on the job, constantly chopping and changing line-ups. Both Fisher and the team appear baffled by Jackson's diktat that they must play the triangle offense, a tactical approach that served him well when he led the Chicago Bulls and the Los Angeles Lakers to 11 titles. Of course, those storied tactics were that bit more effective when being deployed around one-off talents like Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant.

Before becoming the NBA coach with the highest winning percentage, Jackson played on the last New York team to win a title back in 1973, and his return to Madison Square Garden was supposed to be a triumphant homecoming. Lured out of retirement following a meeting with

the Knicks' owner James Dolan at a Hollywood party last Christmas, and an ensuing offer of \$12 million (£9.7million) a season, he told his opening press conference back in March. "This is the best place to play basketball." The problem is that statement hasn't really held true for a long, long time.

Took over reins

In the autumn of 1999, shortly after the Knicks were defeated in the NBA finals by the San Antonio Spurs, Dolan took over the reins, the club essentially being gifted to him by his father Charles, founder of Cablevision, a television and communications giant. Since then the Spurs have won four more titles, whereas New York have only been as far as the second round of the play-offs once.

Aside from failing to contend, and going through nine different coaches in that time, the club has also become synonymous with dysfunction, an unfortunate tendency many reckon coincided with Dolan's ascension to the top job.

Even by the gaudy standards of



The Knicks' faithful continue to pay the most expensive ticket prices in the sport, and fork over \$12 for beers. Why? Well, because the owner has spent hugely but almost never wisely on the club

American sports ownership, Dolan cuts an especially cartoonish Richie Rich figure. A wannabe rock star who helicopters session musicians to his Long Island mansion for rehearsals, his blues band JD and the Straight Shot released a rather crass single earlier this year called *Under That Hood*, dealing with the contro-

versial shooting death of hoodie-wearing Florida teenager Trayvon Martin. When it comes to the Knicks, the 59-year-old alternates between micro-managing (picking the cheerleaders' outfits) and just plain tomfoolery (trying to impress free agents from other teams by handing them CDs of his music).

Long-suffering

Meanwhile, the long-suffering Knicks' faithful continue to pay the most expensive ticket prices in the sport (more than twice what the Spurs ask of their supporters), and fork over \$7 (£5.60) for soft drinks and \$12 for beers. Why? Well, because the owner has spent hugely but almost never wisely on the club.

When a team employee brought a \$5m sexual harassment case against then coach Isiah Thomas back in 2007, Dolan refused to settle out of court and ended up paying \$11.5m. That this mistake might struggle to make the Knicks' top 10 most expensive errors of the past decade sums up their profligacy. In a league with a strict salary cap

where one bad personnel move can cripple a club for years, Dolan has repeatedly overpaid players and coaches, and too often ended up having to buy them out of lengthy contracts to stop the bleeding. After just one disastrous season in charge, Larry Brown was given \$18m to walk away back in 2006. The current side vies with the Philadelphia 76ers for the title of worst team while boasting two of the top five earners in Anthony and the injury-prone Amare Stoudemire shows that little has changed in the meantime.

Indeed, things have reached such a sorry pass that some Knicks' fans are now hoping the team keeps losing in order to better improve the chances of snagging a young superstar like Duke University center Jahil Okafor in next summer's draft. The problem with that approach is it requires a modicum of patience and a lot of long-term planning, and, even before Jackson came back to town trailing mantras about mindfulness, the Knicks, Dolan and New York have always been all about living in the moment.

Gaelic Games Dublin

Brogan urged to give Dublin another year

McCarthy says team-mate's experience is vital as county look to win back All-Ireland

All Star defender admits younger players' heavy schedule leads to more injuries

EAMON DONOGHUE

Dublin's All Star defender James McCarthy is hopeful that team-mate Alan Brogan will stay on with the county panel for another year.

Brogan has yet to confirm whether he intends to extend his intercounty career to a 13th season, but for McCarthy the 32-year-old's big game know-how is certainly "worth having around".

Brogan returned last summer from an injury-plagued 2013, and with Ciaran Kilkenny coming back soon from his cruciate ligament and Brogan suggesting any sort of return would be post-league, three is increasing doubt about the future of the 2011 Footballer of the Year.

For McCarthy, though, it's "definitely important" that the three-time All Star does opt to prolong his Dublin career.

"It's important because he's great to help the young fellas coming in, it's great to help them out. I remember a couple of years ago when I came in myself, he helped me. They have seen so much - so, yeah, they're definitely worth having around."

Achilles injury

The "they" refers to Brogan and Ger Brennan. The St Vincent's centre back missed every championship game for Dublin last year because of a persistent Achilles' injury.

"They've been there and done that. Those moments in games when the heat is on, they know how to react. Gerry definitely has a handle on these situations."

Brennan's absence was amplified during Dublin's championship exit against Donegal in the All-Ireland semi-final.

The team's naivety in defence that day in particular allowed the Ulster champions to slice through at will, scoring

3-14 in total. "I'd say we did [miss Brennan against Donegal]," said McCarthy. "I'd be good friends with Gerry, we've played for a few good years together and we've a good understanding. I think we did miss him."

While both Brogan and Brennan have had their latter years disrupted by injuries, at just 24 McCarthy is himself beginning to feel the strain of an excessive playing schedule which is likely to rule him out of the early stages of next year's league campaign. His ongoing groin injury may even require surgery.

Long seasons

"I look after myself. I'm beginning to think it is [overuse]. I haven't had much time off to be honest and just going for long seasons and playing a lot of games. Just the volumes, I guess, it eventually gets you."

"We have had lads with injuries that are down to more wear and tear than breaking bones or things snapping. It definitely is a factor, particularly those years at 20 or 21 when you're playing under-21, senior, club, college. In a way, I'm delighted I can just concentrate on the one team now."

"There's no structure to it. You're just going from one competition to the next and you do have time off but it's a bit of a mess. You'd just like to know you've a set time off like six weeks. There is surely a way to tidy the thing up. They have to do it."

Injuries aside, McCarthy admits a disappointing conclusion to last summer's championship took its toll on the panel but all concerned are "just mad for road now" in 2015.

"In two years we have lost once [in championship] and obviously there are things which we have to work on, but it is not the end of the world. There is going to be no major overhaul."



Fond memories of 'a gent and a true blue'

Tributes paid to Dublin county chairman Andy Kettle following his death

EAMON DONOGHUE

The passing of Dublin County board chairman Andy Kettle on Tuesday has led to shock, grief and warm memories throughout GAA circles for a man who put "sterling" work into the association he loved.

The Fingal Ravens clubman was, at 68, heading into his fifth year as county chairman, having overseen a period in which Dublin won two All-Ireland football titles, numerous Leinster titles in football, a first hurling title in 52 years and league titles in both codes.

Kettle had survived a bout of prostate cancer around 14 years ago and had been in good health. But in October things turned for the worse when a

check-up showed the return of the cancer.

"He was an extremely popular figure within the wider GAA family, but of course was particularly active with his native Dublin," said GAA President Liam O'Neill. "His warm, friendly, inclusive demeanour struck a chord with people and drew people easily to his company."

"His infectious enthusiasm could be seen on match days at Croke Park, but of course much of his sterling work was overseen away from the glare down through the various other ranks of Gaelic games in the capital city."

Former Dublin player Desie Farrell, now chief executive of the Gaelic Players Association,

said that "Andy was deeply committed to the development of Gaelic games both in his club, Fingal Ravens, and his county. He was a staunch ally of all the county's teams in hurling and football."

"He wore his heart on his sleeve, and his affection and public support for players will be remembered fondly by those with whom he served."

Legacy of service

In his role as Dublin minor and U21 football manager, Farrell had worked closely with Kettle. So had the current county senior football manager, Jim Gavin. Talking to RTE Radio One, Gavin said that "he leaves behind a legacy of service and influence in the GAA."

"We'd a very open and honest relationship with Andy. He was a man of integrity. He was very principled. He had a great passion for the association and for developing Gaelic games in Dublin, both hurling and foot-

ball, and I do recall, after some of our games sharing a meal with Andy, that he talked with great pride about the Fingal hurling team."

"He attended our training sessions, he attended team meetings, he came with the players on the bus, he was in the dressing room at our shoulder in victory and defeat. If one was going to battle, Andy Kettle is someone that you would want at your side."

Dublin Lord Mayor Christy Burke and many players passed and present offered their condolences to Kettle's wife, Phyllis, his sons Patrick, Peter and Eoin and his daughters Niamh, Orla and Ciara.

Dublin footballer Philly McMahon was one of the throngs of social media users to express their sadness at the sudden news. "Life can be so cruel. RIP Andy Kettle," he said. Bernard Brogan referred to Kettle as "a gent and a true blue".

In 2011 Kettle memorably

donned the No 12 jersey of Conal Keane ahead of the All-Ireland quarter-final as a show of support for the player, who at the time was in hospital after a motorcycle accident.

"Terrible news about Andy Kettle a true gentleman that loved Dublin GAA," Keane tweeted. "May he rest in peace. I don't think any other chairman would have done this for a player on such an important fixture. A True Dublin Hero."

Kettle underwent chemotherapy and seemed to be recovering, sometimes heading off after to catch matches. But three weeks ago his health went downhill rapidly.

Ar dheis lámh Dé go raibh anam dhílis.

News

Walsh set to return for Kerry in January

MORTIMER MURPHY

Eamonn Fitzmaurice has confirmed the return of Tommy Walsh to the Kerry fold. The Kerry manager says that Walsh will play with Kerry in the McGrath Cup against IT Tralee in January.

Walsh played 15 times for Kerry between 2007 and 2009, scoring 4-23 before heading to Australia in late 2009 and signing for St Kilda. In 2011, he moved to the Sydney Swans, where injury blighted his AFL career. Now aged 26, he resumes his football career with Kerry and his return in the wake of Declan O'Sullivan's departure could not be timelier.

Meanwhile, five-time All-Ireland medal winner Marc Ó Sé confirmed via social media late last week that he intends to continue to line out with the Kerry in 2015.

New jersey

After the launch of the new Kerry jersey, Ó Sé said on Twitter that "I will have to



Tommy Walsh: set to make his comeback in the McGrath Cup

give the new jersey a run-out in 2015 and see how it feels"

When pressed further as to whether he would be looking to overtake his brother Tomás's championship appearance record, Marc confirmed this return. "I won't be too worried about his record, but looking forward to a long year hopefully."

Ó Sé made his 80th championship appearance in the All-Ireland final against Donegal and he lies just one behind his brother Darragh, and eight shy of Tomás, who holds the national record. Marc and Colm Cooper are the longest serving members of the Kerry panel, having both made their senior championship debuts in 2002.

It is expected that Aidan O'Mahony will be out for three months and James O'Donoghue might not return until May, but the expected return of Cooper in March and the news regarding Walsh provides a big boost to Kerry.

Ballyhale have confirmed they have nominated Joey Holden as Kilkenny senior hurling captain for next year.

Mixed Martial Arts

Fighters' anti-trust lawsuit may threaten future of UFC

A group of current and former UFC fighters have claimed that the organisation is an illegal monopoly under federal antitrust law and have filed a lawsuit in the US District Court for the Northern District of California.

The UFC, in their view, unlawfully stifles competition from other mixed martial arts leagues. By denying UFC fighters opportunities to bargain with rival leagues, the UFC can pay its fighters low wages and impose strict employment restrictions.

According to this theory, the UFC leaves its fighters with no bargaining leverage and then takes full and brutal advantage

of this absence of competition. The group includes UFC star Cung Le as well as former stars Jon Fitch and Nate Quarry. They seek certification to represent other fighters in what might become a massive class action.

Antitrust trebling

In a recent column for *Sports Illustrated*, Michael McCann, a Massachusetts attorney, said that, if successful, Cung and his co-plaintiffs could demand monetary damages, which would be automatically trebled under antitrust law, plus a court injunction that would force changes to the UFC.



Nate Quarry: joining forces with a roster of UFC stars

As a sport, mixed martial arts has grown in value from \$2 million (£1.6 million) in 2002 to

The fighters contend they've been forced to sign oppressive contracts

as much as \$3.5 billion (£2.8 billion) today.

"The fighters contend they've been forced to sign oppressive contracts that make them indentured servants to UFC," McCann writes. "As the fighters see it, they've been unlawfully denied free agency and name, image and likeness rights. "This denial has led to seem-

ingly low salaries compared to massive UFC revenues. According to Cung's complaint, while the starting fight purse for a UFC fighter is just \$6,000 (£4,800), the UFC generated \$483 million (£388 million) in revenue from October 2012 to September 2013 and has profit margins higher than all or nearly all other major professional sports."

Pay estimates

"While there is considerable debate about average and median earnings for UFC fighters," McCann writes, "estimates generally indicate the average UFC fighter takes home less than

\$100,000 (£80,000) a year."

McCann believes that the UFC will defend on four key points: that fighters voluntarily sign contracts to fight in the UFC; that its rules and business practices reflect superior business acumen; that a previous Federal Trade Commission investigation into UFC for anti-trust violations but declined to pursue the matter; and that a judge forcing changes to its business model would harm the very heart of the industry.

McCann also writes that anti-trust litigation in the US often takes years to play out, so no one should expect a swift resolution.

Results round-up

Basketball

National Basketball Association - Brooklyn Nets 91 Miami Heat 95, Memphis Grizzlies 105 Golden State Warriors 98, New Orleans Pelicans 119 Utah Jazz 111, New York Knicks 87 Dallas Mavericks 107, Sacramento Kings 92 Oklahoma City Thunder 104, Washington Wizards 109 Minnesota Timberwolves 95.

Cricket

SECOND TEST (in Brisbane) India 311-4 (M Vijay 144, A M Rahane 75 no) v Australia. FIRST TEST (in Centurion) South Africa 340-3 (AB de Villiers 141 no, H Anlia 133 no) v West Indies. FORTH ONE DAY INTERNATIONAL (in Abu Dhabi) New Zealand 299-5 (K Williamson 123, M Guptill 58, D Brownlie 42) Pakistan 292-8 (Y Khan 103, S Afridi 49, D Vettori 3-53). New Zealand won by seven runs. Series tied 2-2.

Gaelic Games

LEINSTER COLLEGEES - South

Leinster Juv FC B semi-final: Col Bhríde Carnew 4-13 Col Isagann Portlannaigh 3-10; North Leinster Juv FC B semi-final: So Dara Killocock 3-11 Ashbourne CS 3-19.

Ice Hockey

National Hockey League - Arizona Coyotes 2 Edmonton Oilers 1, Calgary Flames 2 New York Rangers 5, Chicago Blackhawks 5 Minnesota Wild 3, Detroit Red Wings 0 Columbus Blue Jackets 1, Florida Panthers 2 Washington Capitals 1, Montreal Canadiens 4 Carolina Hurricanes 1, Nashville Predators 3 Boston Bruins 2, Philadelphia Flyers 1 Tampa Bay Lightning 3, St. Louis Blues 5 Los Angeles Kings 2, Toronto Maple Leafs 6 Anaheim Ducks 2, Winnipeg Jets 5 Buffalo Sabres 1.

Tennis

ITF MEN'S FUTURES (Lome, Togo, West Africa) - Singles second round: (4) Ivk Klec (Svk) bt Daniel Glancy (Ur) 6-2 7-6 (7/4); (1) Enrique Lopez Perez (Spa) bt David O'Hare (Ir) 6-2 6-3.